

# Don't worry, bee happy

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

-----

Apidya is typical Amiga shoot-'em-up fare. It's a Japanese style bullet-hell-melon-masher produced by a *German* team, starring a manga character who discovers that his wife has been 'spoiled' by an insect army.

Being a manga creation he's naturally an angry chap and so opens his mouth wide and goes all glinty-eyed to show he's annoyed and wants to skewer someone's head on a yari. To prove it Ikuro magically transforms into a bee and storms off to locate the antidote and duff up the curator of this tyranny. As you do. He doesn't even pause to ponder the thespian conundrum, "to bee or not to bee?". Surely *that* is the question?



Originally published by Dusseldorf based outfit Playbyte in December 1991, the only premium release version of the manual I've been able to track down is written in German. This is 40 pages long as opposed to the pamphlet issued by Team 17 to accompany the later budget edition.

Playbyte's more comprehensive manual embellishes the story told in the game's animated introduction (and summarised in a few lines in Team 17's iteration), yet the core details are identical. I won't reproduce Google's attempt at translation here seeing as most of the creative scene-setting narrative is lost amidst the gibberish. I got the gist at least.



Hexaae - the evil lord of black magic - harbours an unspecified grudge against manga-man, Ikuro. Rather than confront him personally he attacks his wife, Yuri, and doesn't even intend to get his hands bloody doing that. Instead he douses a swarm of benign insects with a paranormal potion, ensorcelling them to do his bidding.



A SWARM OF THOUSAND MUTATED INSECTS  
IS ABOUT TO FULFILL ITS FATAL MISSION

Hexaae, in a fit of rage, unleashes the critters upon Yuri, who obediently molest her within an inch of life, causing the princessy type damsel to fall into a coma of some sort. Ikuro arrives home and is understandably devastated to discover his dishevelled, unconscious wife.

Vowing revenge (some fist-shaking was bound to have been involved) he deploys a mystical amulet to metamorphisise into a bee, allowing him to strike back at the insect world on their home turf once equally proportioned.



MY POOR YURI. I WILL GO AND SEEK FOR  
THE MAGIC ANTIDOTE!



Why he didn't just cut out the middle ma... insects, and set off to find Hexaae to wrestle the antidote out of him as a human is anyone's guess. It would have saved a heck of a lot of toil and trouble and averted the risk of getting trapped in the Alice in Wonderland milieu of Honey I Shrunk the Kids. He could have fly-swatted/bug sprayed the mini pests from aloft for the sheer thrill of payback, and been on his way in a matter of minutes.

Of course, then we'd never have got to experience the luscious lunacy of Apidya, and I wouldn't be telling you that the name derives from the insect superfamily 'Apoidea', which includes sphecoid wasps and bees.



If you took one look at our protagonist's post-transformation embodiment and said, "that's not a bee, it's a wasp", you might have to rethink. It all depends which species you're comparing as some look very similar. You'd have to be an apiarist to tell some of them apart. It doesn't matter much in any case since the taxonomy that inspired the game's title covers both bases, so take your pick.

Apidya's title screen incorporates four Japanese katakana characters that spell out 'A-BI-DYA' suggesting that someone made a bit of a goof. Its developers, Kaiko, are alternately known as A.U.D.I.O.S (Art Under Design Imaginations Of Sound), which makes about as much sense in *English*, so let's not quibble. I'm prepared to let it bee.

Similarly baffling, we learn from an interview with legendary musician, Chris Huelsbeck, conducted by T.R. Schmidt for his Kaiko fan site that the 'II' seen in the title screen doesn't indicate that Apidya has a predecessor, or there exists an earlier Japanese game bearing the same name. It was just "a gag to provide for some excitement.... ;)".



Apidya programmer, Peter Thierolf, further added to the knowledge base when he was interviewed by German web site Classic Video Games. This one specifically focused on Apidya and so is far more comprehensive on the subject, albeit written in German. Luckily it translates very well, *unlike* the manual. Make a beeline for Google Translate and you may just find out how he brought Apidya to life with such

silky smooth precision that people forget to mention how effective and reliable the controls are. It's not something we should take for granted. We moan enough when they're *broken*.

Apidya is split into five distinctively themed levels: initially a meadow, followed by a pond, sewer, a mechanised mother-ship of some sort similar to the backdrops seen in R-Type, and finally a cavernous wasteland evoking a sense of flying through a network of human arteries littered with metallic wreckage.



Each concludes with a bizarre guardian skirmish, while the last level alone features five. Some are amongst the most inventive you'll see featured in an Amiga game.

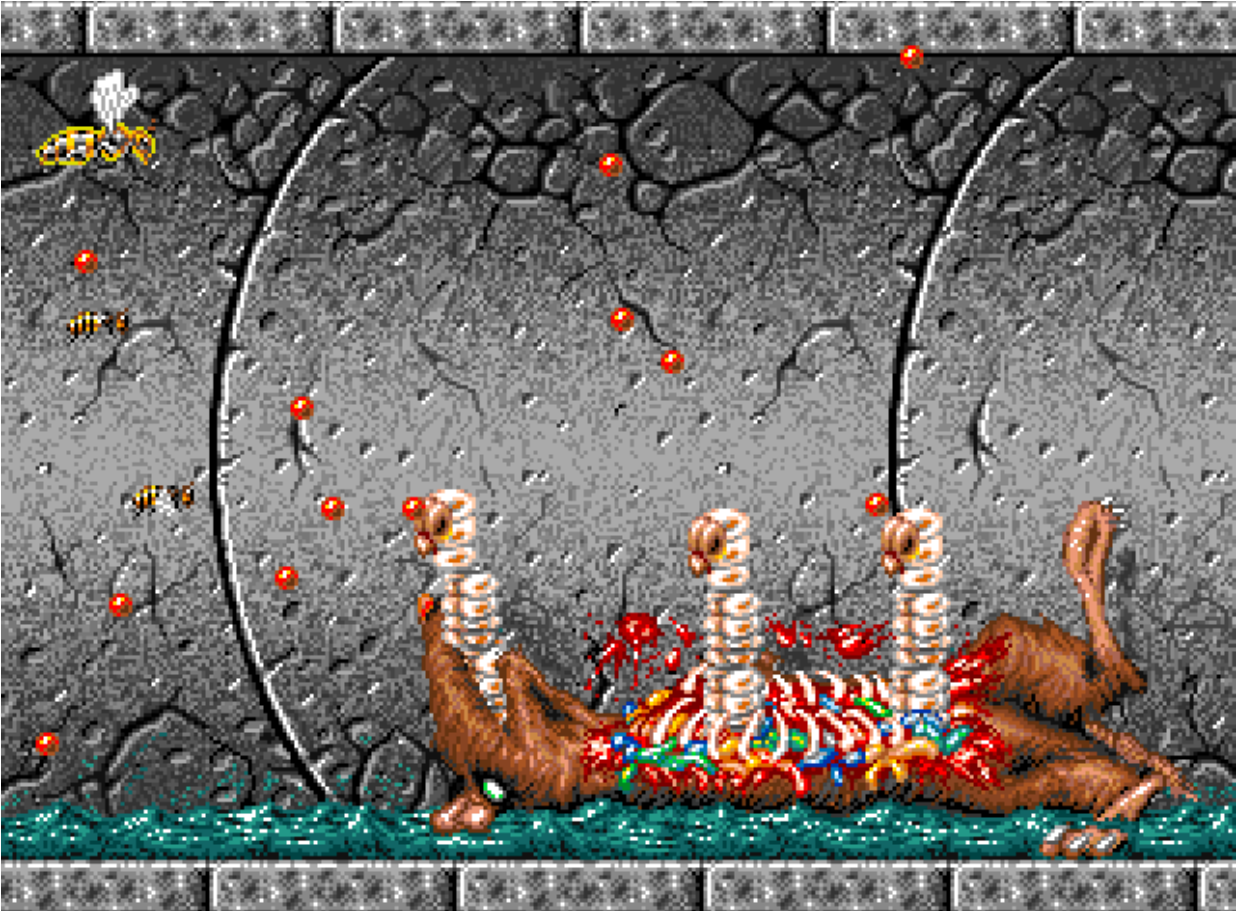
A fireball-regurgitating Monty Mole is up first. Once defeated we can fly into his vacant burrow to embark on the second of the bonus challenges. This involves navigating an interconnected underground tunnel network to collect as many crystals as possible before emerging to commence the remainder of the level.



If you're wondering what happened to the *first* bonus stage, you might like to try killing the caterpillar you probably cruised carefully by earlier. Once through the looking glass, we hurtle past a throng of floating angels and demons, collecting the former for points and avoiding the latter. Weapons are neutered for this part so we're especially fragile.



Next in the lineup is a decomposing, infested rat that bursts open when approached, its abdomen ruptured by feeding maggots, revealing its colourful rotting innards. Charming. I hope you weren't eating your tea!



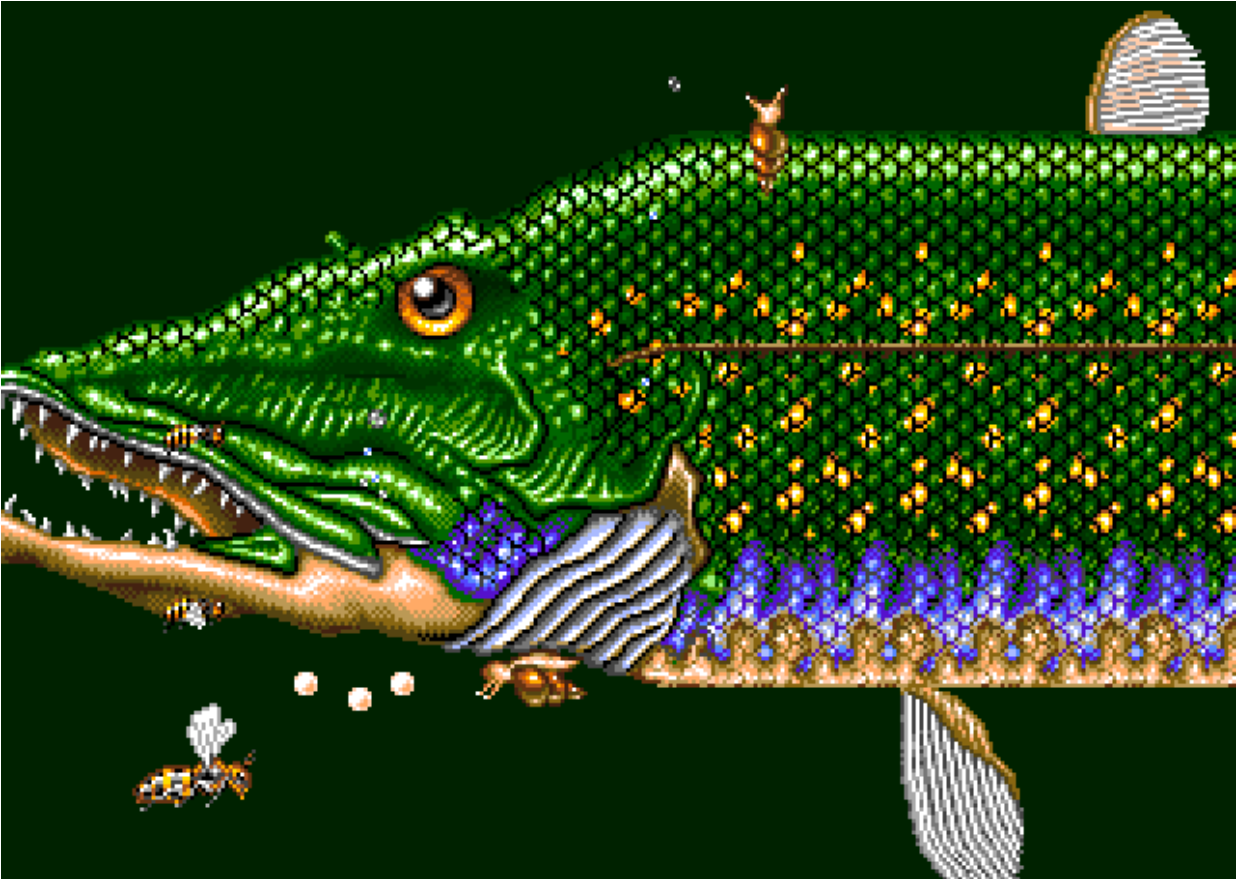
Elsewhere we meet a Chucky style possessed doll whose speciality is projectile-vomiting globules of green... well you get the idea. Extendy-hands and laser-beam-shooting eyes enhance its arsenal to complete the grotesque unwelcoming rendezvous.



It doesn't get any prettier when we're introduced to the Siamese twins comprised only of faces embedded in internal organs. I know beauty is only skin deep, in the eye of the beholder and all that, but...

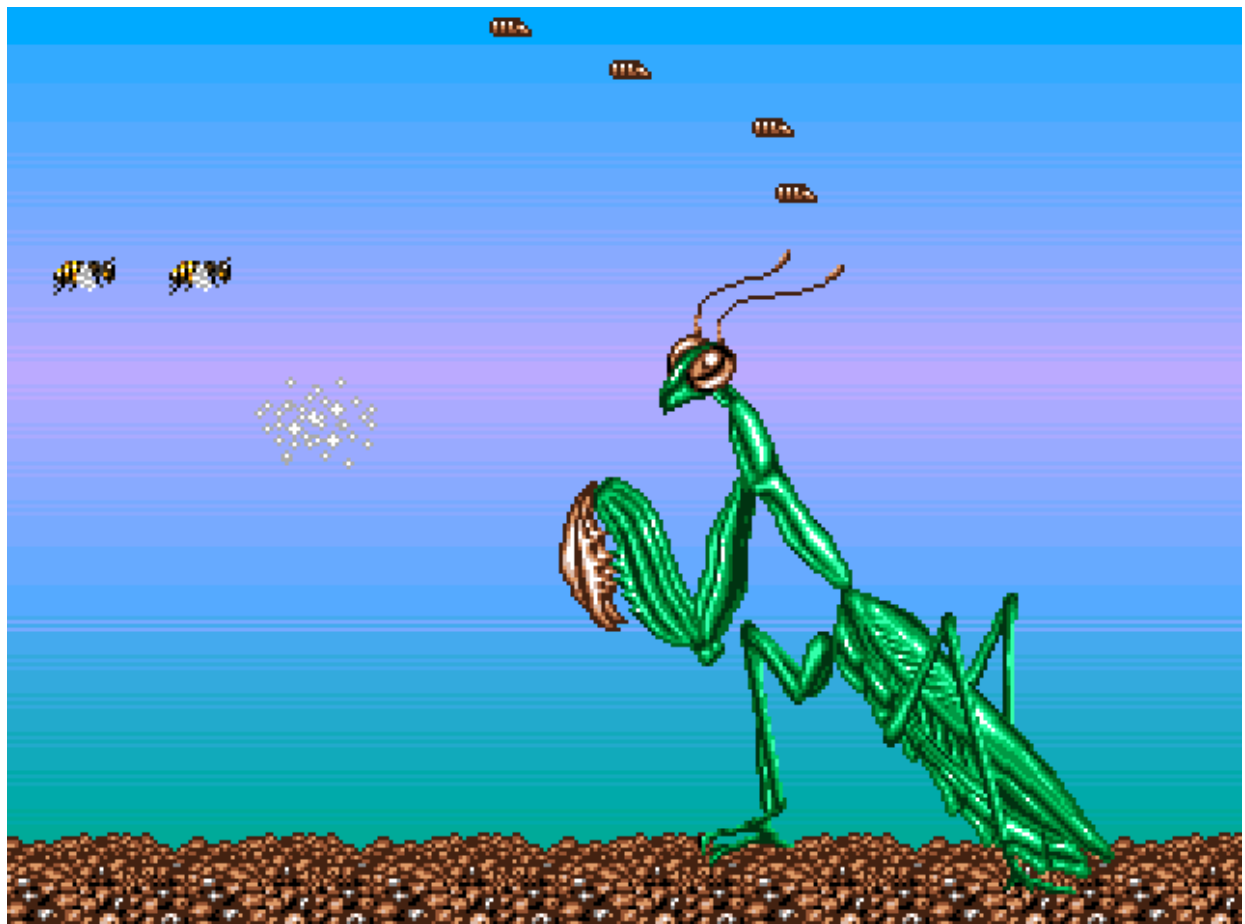


As one of the Amiga magazine critics pointed out at the time, perhaps the most impressive boss is the trout that occupies several screen-lengths of the playfield. Only it's not a trout, it's a *pike*. Know your fish, people! Did your dad never take you fishing when you were a wee sproglet? Pike are the nasty freshwater fish with razor-sharp teeth that like to bite chunks out of small species like roach and perch. Anything really. They'll even chew on carp that are much bigger and heavier than they are.



Anyway, this terror from the deep must be manoeuvred around until we can safely align ourselves with its eye, and do stuff involving sharp objects that would make me wince with squeemish-itis if I described it any further. To take our minds off that we could try nipping inside its mouth to engage in another bonus session.

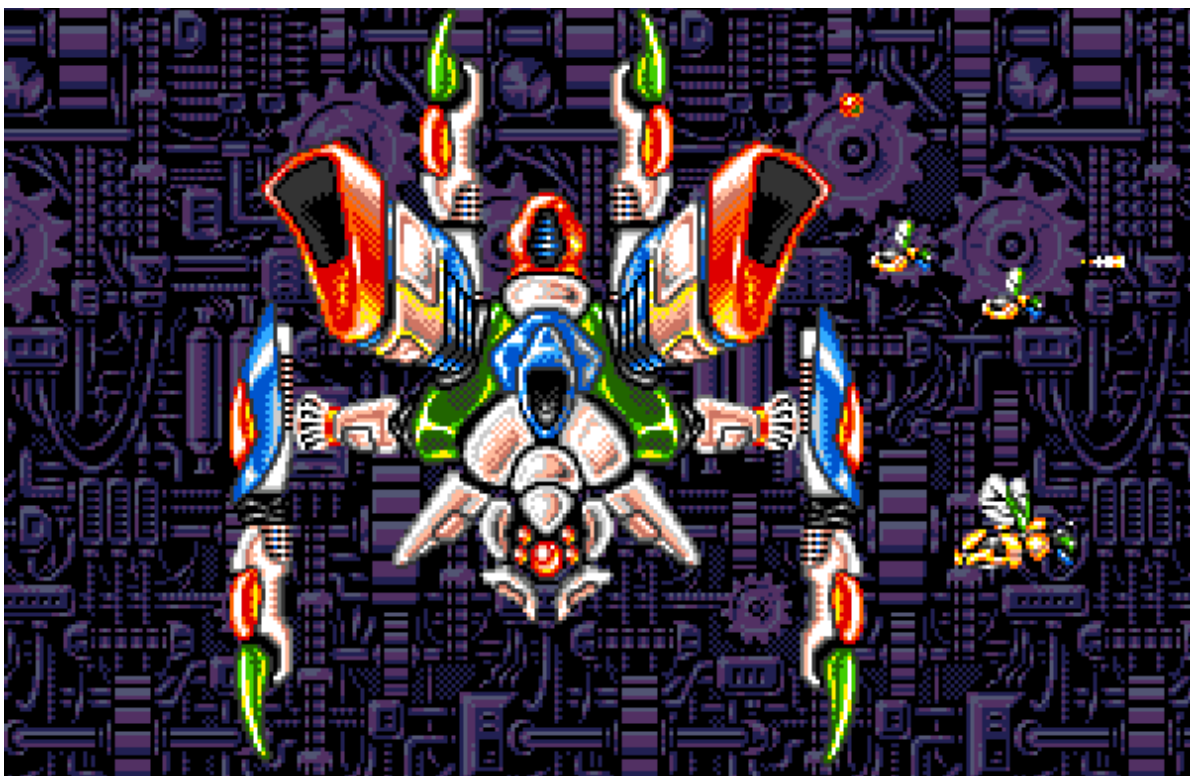
Other gate-keeping highlights include a praying mantis...



...lobster...



...and a mechanical Transformer crab. All are as tall as the screen of course. Ultimately we face one of our own kith and kin; it's just like looking in the mirror. A humongous magnifying mirror!



Our default weapon is the 'light sword', though this can be upgraded via a Gradius style system whereby we collect flowers to shift the focus of an indicator positioned over a selection bar. Up for grabs are capability-boosting power-ups as well as ballistics; speed-up, bombs, spreadshot, lightning, plasma pulse, outrider drones, shield, and speed-down (to counteract too many of the opposite). No buzz-ookas I'm disappointed to report. Pressing the spacebar, second fire button (if you have one) or waggling the joystick selects the weapon currently highlighted. You can imagine how convenient the latter technique is!

Alternatively, we can opt for the game to switch between them automatically by toggling the relevant item in the options menu before beginning. That makes a lot more sense since Apidya is insanely difficult *without* having to juggle all the various weapon switches. One-hit death scenarios usually *are*. Either way, we still hold down the fire button for a few seconds to release a massive bee stinger missile a la R-Type.

Obviously the drawback is that we leave ourselves wide open to attack in-between holding down the fire button and releasing it.

We possess multiple lives and can alter the frequency at which we earn more by amending the difficulty setting, though this prevents us from progressing beyond level four and confronting the final boss to complete the game properly. All very Japanesey I have to say what with the inclusion of multiple endings, and only one being the genuine one. Anyone would think this was deliberate. ;)

Multiple lives are actually a bit of a misnomer since dying causes us to re-spawn with so little firepower that we may as well reset the game and start again (or give up more than likely!). Should we fail to capitalise on the downtime at the very beginning, levelling up our defences while it's relatively quiet and peaceful, we won't get another opportunity at any point. It's relentless beyond the first few screens. A real shame since so few of us will ever experience the later levels without cheating or watching the longplay. That's a waste of the developers' time and our money.

We nearly didn't get to see the game at all in fact since Kaiko were running so short of funds during its extended production cycle that it risked being cancelled. This was in spite of 11,000 mail order/fair sales of Chris Huelsbeck's first audio CD release, 'Shades', in 1991 (as divulged in his video conference interview with Kim Justice, December 2016).

It's thanks to the cameo-heavy gimmicky platformer 'Quik and Silva' that Apidya was salvaged. Programmed in just two weeks, this was sold lock, stock and barrel to the disk-based magazine, Amiga Fun. Kaiko received 30,000 DM for the Amiga rendering and 20,000 DM for the Atari ST interpretation; sufficient to allow them to continue investing

in Apidya's development, carrying the project through to completion.



It was only to be a temporary bailout for Kaiko sadly as they folded in 1994. Chris puts this down to the team "missing someone like Julian Eggebrecht to take care of the business side" (refer to Kim Justice interview).

You can certainly see *why* Apidya took so long to come to fruition without investing in too much detective work. Graphically it's amongst the most refined of the 2D titles in the Amiga's history, while the music composed by Turrican maestro, Chris Huelsbeck, is also a strong contender for multiple plaudits. Maybe he's born with it? It's not Maybeelline.



There are 20 absorbing techno-synth tracks in all that seamlessly vacillate between playful or sombre elegies and note-crunching, kinetic military marches. Each can also be sampled and appreciated from the menu without having to reach the parts of the game during which they're showcased. A very wise decision given the crazy difficulty curve that would otherwise have buried them deep within the code. There's little chance they would have been enjoyed by mere mortals until UAE came along with its audio-ripping features.

Chris's majestically memorable soundtrack rouses all the emotions demanded by the dawning realisation that my wife has been ruthlessly poisoned by malevolent dark forces. Well, so I *imagine*. To my knowledge, my wife has never been mauled by a supernaturally entranced army of insect drones. I haven't even *got* a wife.

Regardless, the score perfectly complements our epic crusade to secure the antidote to her unfortunate predicament and the triumphant execution of Ikuro's bizarre, personal brand of retribution against Yuri's callous attacker.

With its soporific melancholy, War at Meadow's Edge sets the high water mark from the outset, and the tide never goes out. Whilst evoking the immediacy of Ikuro's frantic quest to remedy his plight, it's harnessed by the diametrically opposed serenity of a lullaby, as though reigning in his seething fury, keeping him focused on the trepidatious task at hand.



Backdrops are unassumingly simple, though effectively rendered using the kind of copper tricks for which the Amiga is renowned. Parallax-scrolling doesn't let the side down either. Beautifully minimalist, a single wheat stalk or holly berry branch drifting by the foreground in slow motion, almost brushing the 'camera', is sufficient to provoke a believable corollary of depth perception.



More impressive still is the pond level, split into above and below water hemispheres. Swerving a major mistake made by other rival games in the genre, thankfully (somehow) flying beneath the surface doesn't kill us, or even hamper our manoeuvrability. Bees are notorious for committing suicide by dive-bombing into any water they can find, so this feat must be the result of German-Japanese manga voodoo. There's no other viable explanation.

Illusions and sorcery aside, what makes these scenes really special, however, is that objects and foliage can be seen both above and below water. No, bear with me. Where they pierce the surface and beneath, they appear to be displaced due to the varying refraction of light waves in different mediums, hence represented by a staggered continuity. Now that's attention to detail.

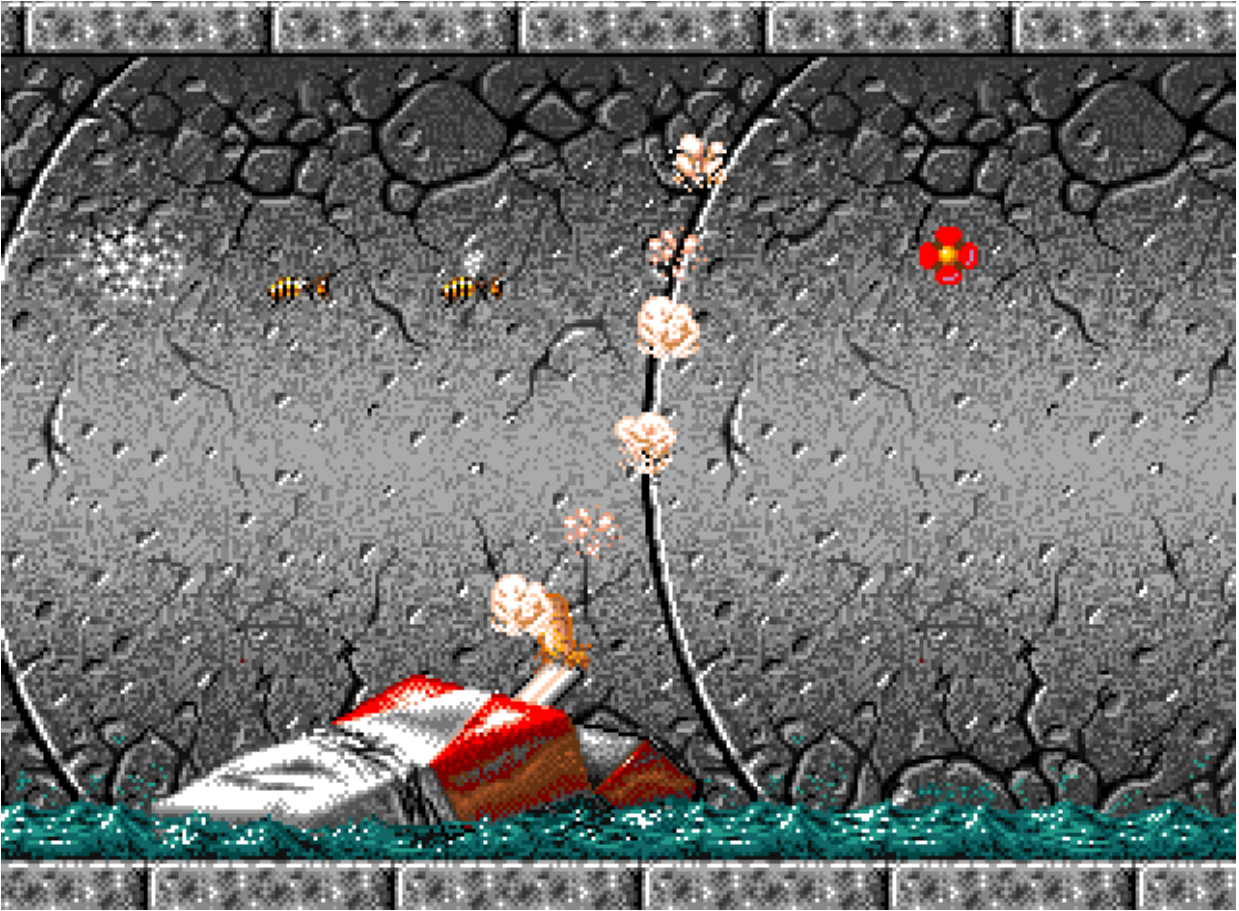


Again due to changes in the reflection/absorption of lightwave frequencies, underwater areas should appear darker. And low and behold they *do*! They're largely composed of assorted murky shades of green, giving the impression that aside from being dimly lit, the flora is coated with algae. Above the line, bright sunshine ensures that anything not submerged is radiantly illuminated.

Sewer water while only animated where it pours in through waste pipes is home to some interesting, intricately detailed props. Such as the weaponised Pepsi can, haunted by God knows what. Clawing to break free, its face emerges through the base and doesn't think twice about mounting an offensive against us, while wasps fly out of the ring-pulled opening and double back to attack.



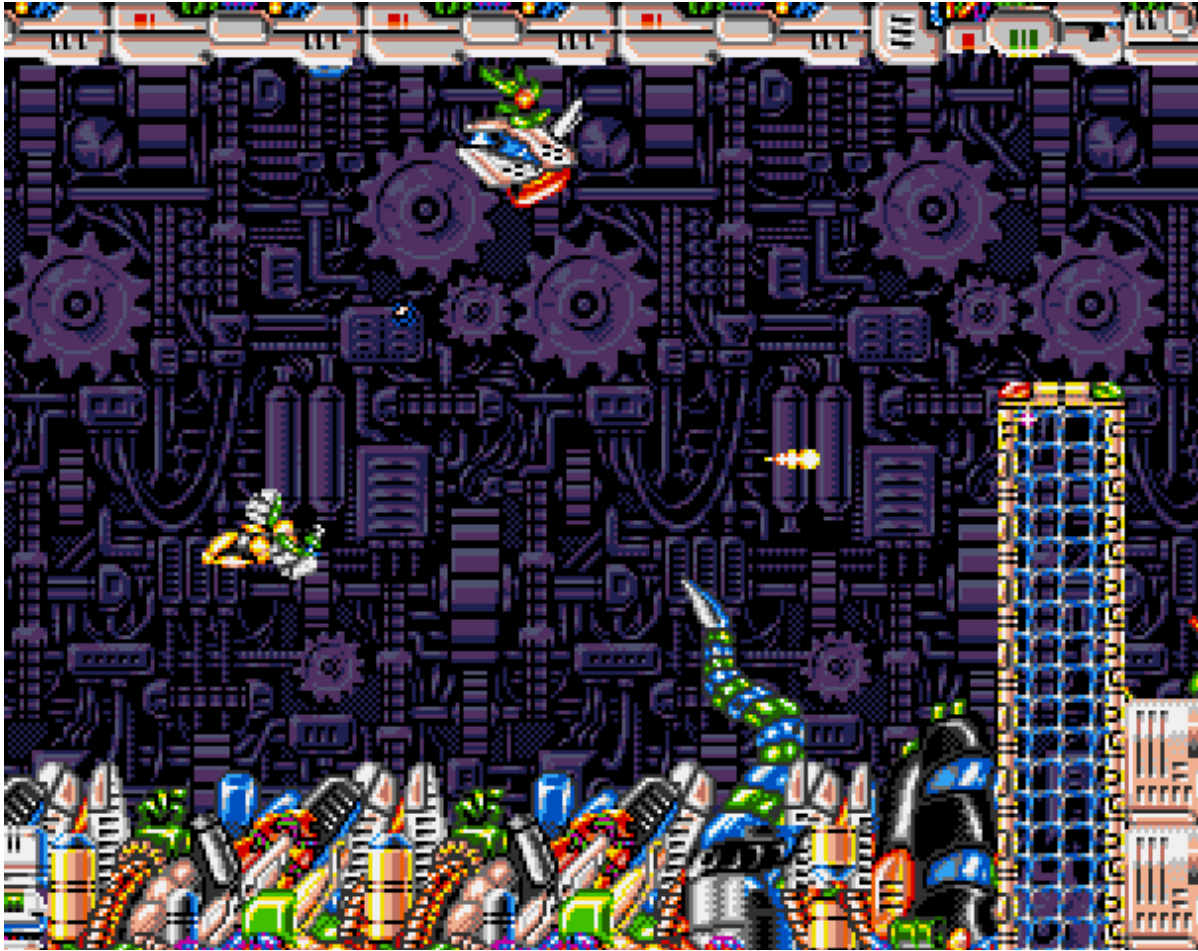
Other litter includes discarded cigarette packets containing burning cancer-death sticks. Emitting deadly puffs of tar-laden smoke these are as harmful to bees as humans. I don't know who lights a cigarette then puts it back in the packet and chucks it down the nearest sewer grid, but who cares? It's a helpful idea to implant in the minds of kids. Not the littering, you know what I mean.



Continuing the theme of noxious substances, poison bottles emit toxic vapour into the atmosphere. Stray into it and the screen flips upside-down, reversing our controls. As if the game wasn't already impossibly tough!



Once inside the Death Star (or whatever it is), the walls are comprised of pumping pistons, grinding gears, and churning cogs. It's a *hive* of activity, arduously labouring for reasons that aren't elucidated, though no doubt in homage to R-Type. Turrican is likewise represented courtesy of the mini ED-209s sporting their knight helmets mounted on organic bodies. All very colourful as if to throw us off the scent, while simultaneously acknowledging its forefathers.



You'd barely notice any of this impeccable detail as the ninja gamer wielding the joystick, even *after* transmogrifying into a bionic super bee, as is obligatory in this level. As a longplay observer we have the luxury of sitting back to savour the ride safe in the knowledge that we won't bite the bullet because Ironclaw is playing and he's unbreakable *without* cheating. I'm just a wanna-bee in comparison.

You'd think the two-player co-op mode would even up the odds. Ha! Beehave yourself! It's not as easy as that. Player two operates as a diminutive, inferior drone with limited initial capabilities and no scope to upgrade their munitions. Once they perish we must go solo. An alternating two-player mode is our other option which helps a bit as it gives each partner a break in-between bouts.



Somehow beat the mega-wasp final guardian and we're home-free. A cutscene ensues to explain how we race to Hexaae's lair, acquire the antidote to Yuri's condition and use it to revive her in the nick of time. She thanks Ikuro as well as us as if we're two separate entities, and we're done. Mission accomplished. Evil vanquished, peace and harmony rehabilitated.



NOW YOU ARE FINISHED WIZARD CREEP ??  
MY SPIRIT SWORD WILL SEAL YOUR FATE  
ONCE AND FOR ALL TIME ??



FINALLY HE REACHES  
THE GOAL OF HIS QUEST  
- THE ANTIDOTE TO HEAL YURI.



By way of celebration, a stream of consciousness style credits roll-call gets underway thanking everyone on the planet, living or dead.

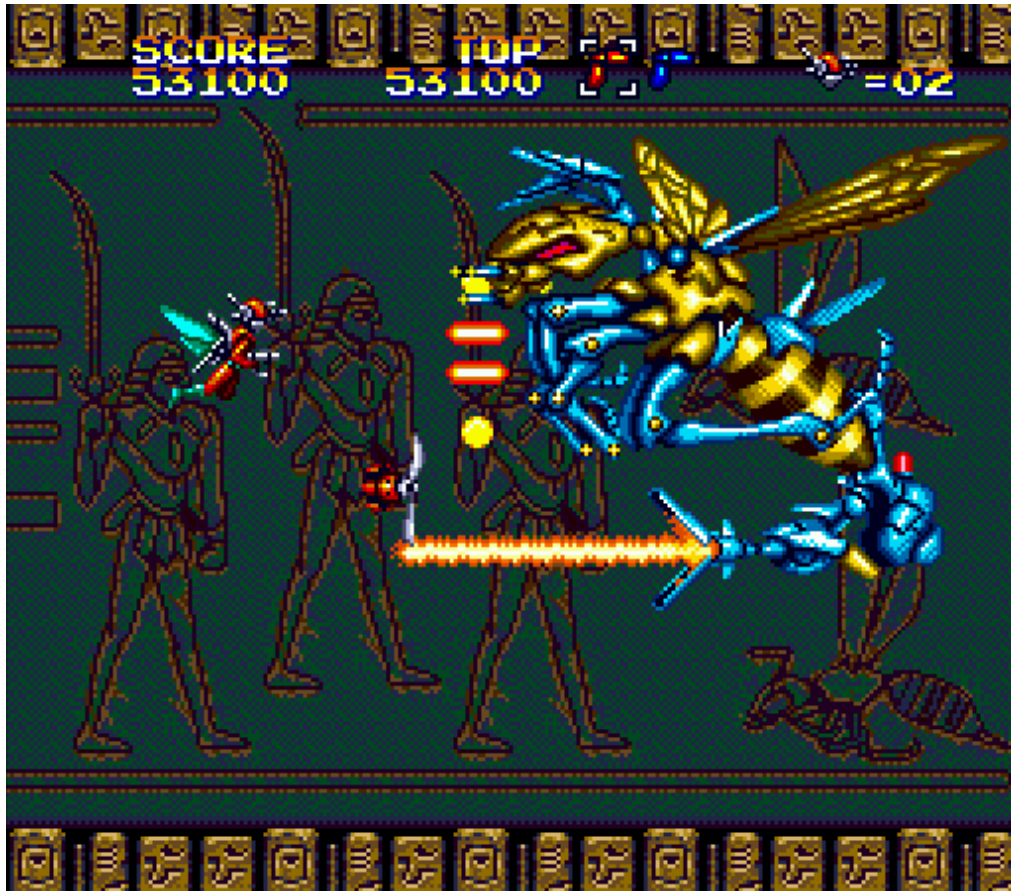
Released alongside Agony and Project X in April 1992, Apidya was up against some strong competition.



All look and sound sublime, though *Agony* has the edge in the playability stakes if only because it's accessible to ordinary *human* players. Though even that quickly wears thin for other reasons, some that are shared by most shoot 'em ups. It's repetitive - and you could argue - *too* easy to make it entertaining.



Apidya while appearing novel to Amiga gamers had been done before in the guise of Insector X, available in coin-op arcades as well as at home courtesy of the NES and Mega Drive.



Two years later in 1991 - though also before Apidya - FM Towns owners were treated to a similar experience via Super Shooting Towns.



Once the *honeymoon* is over, take away its gloss, glamour and novelty factor and Apidya seems less appealing, especially to those of us who can barely flutter a wing without being slaughtered by the waywardly puppeteered wildlife.

Nevertheless, as a showcase for the Amiga's technical prowess and the supreme talent of the developers it's right up there with *Shadow of the Beast*. Stick it in demo mode in a shop window and Amigas would have flown out the door faster than Ikuro, asked to stand in for the Simpson's Bumblebee Man while he goes on holiday.

